Locating young refugees historically: attending to age position in humanitarianism

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Nowadays humanitarian organisations are often keen to engage young displaced people in programmatic efforts. In such efforts attention is commonly paid to the impact of the social dynamics of gender. However, similar consideration of processes associated with age has been less apparent. This paper explains the importance of attending to the 'age position' of young refugees from two inter-related perspectives. Firstly, as a means to comprehend the forces that inform the expression of particular needs and aspirations by young people and, secondly, in order to grasp the historicity of their lives and of the larger displaced population. The paper then moves to offer a conceptual framework for investigating age position. The notion of 'generation' is central to this framework. Four distinct meanings of generation are identified and their application explored through reference to findings from research conducted in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan.

Keywords: Refugees, Children, History, Generations, Palestine, Humanitarianism.

Of the estimated 42 million forced migrants globally (UNHCR, 2012) countless numbers have been displaced for several years or decades. While some have experienced flight first-hand there are also many who have been born into a setting of displacement and may themselves have become parents or even grandparents to children who inherit refugee status. Sahrawi people in Algeria, Somalis, Congolese and Sudanese in the camps of East Africa, Afghans in Pakistan and Iran, Palestinians dispersed across the various countries of the Fertile Crescent, Bhutanese in Nepal, Rohingya in Bangladesh and the Karen in Thailand are only some of the world's long-term displaced populations.

Reflecting the typically high proportion of young people amongst the world's

long-term displaced, sociological attention to refugee children and youth has grown in recent years (e.g. Boyden and de Berry, 2004; Hart, 2008a; Chatty, 2010) However, consideration of the relational dynamics of age is still at an early stage: some way behind that given to gender (e.g. Indra, 1998; Turner, 1999; Nolin, 2006). This essay is motivated by the conviction that attention to the young as 'aged' (as well as 'gendered') social beings is vital to enhance understanding of the lived experience of long-term displacement.

Over recent years even humanitarian organisations that are not focused specifically on the young have developed projects that target this section of the population. There is a tendency in such work to focus upon the "challenges and priorities" of young people (Evans and Lo Forte, 2013: 12) without necessary consideration of the ways in which these challenges and priorities are informed by what I shall henceforth refer to as young people's 'age position'. Thus when working with a group of teenagers, for example, there is an underlying assumption that the "challenges and priorities" they articulate are simply an expression of generic (albeit gendered) teenage experience. Although important, this is only one aspect of a young person's age position. It is also necessary to consider how the needs and aspiration that they voice might be shaped by (a) communal experience since the moment of exile as mediated by successive age-based cohorts; (b) kinship relations – particularly between parents and children; (c) wider societal processes of change. Together with life stage these are all aspects of the framework that I suggest for producing a necessarily multi-faceted understanding of the age position of young people. This framework utilizes the notion of 'generation' to illuminate and bring together these different aspects.

Employment of generation as a central principle not only enables understanding of the

age position of young people, it also offers a framework for learning about processes of social change and the ways that these impact different sections of a refugee population. In recent years the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has introduced the category of 'Protracted Refugee Situations' (PRS): a label applied to refugees "for 5 years or more after their initial displacement, without immediate prospects for implementation of durable solutions" (UNHCR 2009: preamble). Yet, the categorization of all populations displaced for five years or longer uniformly as 'PRS' collapses time and diverts attention from the ongoing dynamics of change, for example in social organization, family composition, gendered and intergenerational relations, and the link between such change and wider historical events. As I seek to explain, 'generations', in its various meanings, offers a conceptual basis for considering change in a fluid and open-ended manner. Young people, like others in the refugee population, are affected by and involved in such change in ways that reflect their age (as well as gender, class, etc) position. Attending to such specificity would be significant for humanitarian efforts, not least in the search for viable long-term solutions: solutions that must be enacted at a particular historical moment and that will have different implications for different sections of a displaced population.

The generational framework for exploring the age position of young displacees and the changing context of their lives is here illustrated by material produced through ethnographic fieldwork in a Palestinian refugee camp in Amman, Jordan. Hussein Camp was established in the wake of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. During the period of my research in the late 1990s and early 2000s it was home to approximately 50,000 Palestinian refugees, the majority of whom had never seen the territory from which their elders had originally fled. In this paper I draw particularly

upon my interactions with young men in the age range 10-20. I begin, however, by arguing for the importance of attending to the young in historical terms.

The young as historical actors

In an influential and much-cited article anthropologist Liisa Malkki notes the "effect of the bureaucratized humanitarian interventions that are set in motion by large population displacements…to leach out the histories and the politics of specific refugees' circumstances." (1996:178) In her view the nature of such interventions makes it difficult "for people in the refugee category to be approached as historical actors rather than simply as mute victims." (Ibid) There is a *governmental* dimension to such an effect in the form of technocratic processes that construct displaced people and their complex experiences as homogenized "cases" in accordance with "bureaucratic dictates" (Zetter, 1991:47) However, meaningful engagement with the long-term displaced as historical actors also entails two distinct but inter-related *conceptual* challenges. The first concerns the agency of refugees, while the second relates to the connection between the forcibly displaced and historical processes. Each of these in respect of the young is discussed in turn.

The agency of the young

The latter decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of the field of childhood studies informed by the work of scholars in the disciplines of sociology, social policy, anthropology, human geography, philosophy and history, amongst others. This field partly came into being as a result of dissatisfaction with the hitherto dominant view of 'socialisation' that took the child to be a passive object of adult instruction. Scholars identified with this emerging field have insisted that the young be considered as "active in the construction and determination of their own social

lives" (Prout and James, 1998:8). Such an argument, now widely taken as normative amongst practitioners as well as academics, entails assertion of the child as a social actor able to exercise agency in transforming his or her circumstances. To some extent this view is evident in the approach to programmatic interventions enacted by organisations working with the long-term displaced. The current vogue for 'child / youth participation' in humanitarian projects is usually surrounded by rhetoric about the young as 'agents' (White and Choudhury, 2007). Yet, closer inspection reveals that organizations' acknowledgement of agency is often mediated by their own mandate, values or strategic interests. Thus, for example, young refugees under the age of 18 are commonly seen as agents when engaged in peacebuilding activities but as exploited victims when they engage with military groups. Clarity about the ways that the young seek to transform their circumstances requires us to be more reflexive about the constraints of our own moral worldview and / or institutional position.

Young people within historical process

While those categorized as 'children' are seen, in some senses and contexts, as social actors and thus as makers of history, less consideration has been given to the ways that the lives of the young might be located within the historical trajectory of a society. Such enquiry is distinct from that pursued by authors such as Phillipe Ariès, Harry Hendrick and Hugh Cunningham into the construction of childhood as a social institution over time. The issue that I am raising relates not only to the pre-existing conditions that the young must negotiate but also to the ways in which their outlook and aspirations are shaped within a particular historical moment mediated by personal experience and the experiences of those around – family, community members and peers.

The relatively scant attention given to the historicity of young people's lives is in sharp contrast to the common focus upon their future. That the young become productive adult citizens who ensure the nation's prosperity has been a central concern of policy-makers and political leaders since at least the latter part of the 19th Century in Europe and North America (e.g. Kent, 1991). This concern has been taken up by development practitioners and rights activists who have advocated investment in children in the global South, principally in the form of western-style education, as a means to achieve future social and economic development (e.g. Tembon and Fort, 2008; World Bank, 2006; .Plan International, 2008).

Scholars within the field of childhood studies have questioned the dominant focus upon children's futures, insisting that we remain attentive to the young as social actors in the present (Uprichard, 2008). The argument has been made for viewing the young as human 'beings' rather than as human 'becomings' (Qvortrup, 1991). Yet, as Emma Uprichard has noted, this dichotomy is misleading, since "it does not account for any future constructions of the child" (2008: 306). In other words, what the young may become is an issue of reflection and daily activity for both themselves and those around them in the present.

Undoubtedly, in order to understand young people's lives and actions in the present we need to consider the impact of imaginings of the future. It is also vital, I would argue, that attention is paid to the ways that the past informs the lives of the young: in terms of their present and with regards to their imaginings of and aspirations for the future. To the notion of the child as 'being' and 'becoming' we might add the idea of 'having been'.

Within popular discussion and in the accounts of philosophers there has been a tendency to view the child as a blank slate upon which knowledge is gradually written

through experience (see also Morarji, this volume). Assumptions of such kind are prevalent in the programming of development and humanitarian organisations. This is evidenced, for example, in peacebuilding and peace education projects that are usually predicated on the belief that teenagers' experiences register only at a superficial level. Personal contact with the 'enemy' and/or a sound peace education curriculum are seen as capable of over-riding such experience, leading to the aspiration for co-existence. Detailed assessments of such projects cast doubt on the thinking of implementing organisations (e.g. Bekerman and Maoz, 2005; Niens and Cairns, 2005; Salamon, 2006).

As Marilyn Strathern has argued there exists no realm "logically prior" to society (1996:64), rather we are all "already embedded in relations" (Ibid: 94). This perspective replaces the commonly assumed dichotomy of 'individual' vs 'society' with a view of "sociality… as intrinsic to the definition of personhood." (Ibid: 64). Strathern's argument is consonant with the critique of conventional views of socialisation as a process during which "the adult…offers directions" and "the child…responds accordingly and is finally rewarded by becoming 'social', by becoming adult" (Prout and James, 1998: 13). Reconceptualising the 'child' as inherently social renders as untenable assumptions that the young are blank slates separable from their socio-historical context.

One further conceptual obstacle to acknowledgement that young refugees are fully implicated in historical processes remains – namely a view found in some quarters that long-term camp dwellers exist in a state of limbo, isolated from wider society. It is certainly true that many encamped populations are formally denied access to employment and are obliged to remain within the confines of a camp. This is not the reality for all refugees, however, and many long-term refugees find ways to move in

and out of camps, operating within the informal economy and accessing services officially denied to them (e.g. Kaiser, 2006: 608). Thus there are grounds to question the assumption that refugees are 'warehoused', to use a term found in some of the writing about the long-term displaced (e.g. Smith, 2004).[i] The assumed state of separation and limbo indicated by this term has led some scholars to suggest that within refugee camps collective processes of change – both material and discursive - are suspended. Marc Augé, for example, has argued that refugee camps are, like airport terminals and shopping malls, "non-places" which are simply "there to be passed through" (1995:104) and in which residents fail to invest meaning. The work of Liisa Malkki offers an opposed view. Her account of Burundian Hutus displaced to Tanzania illustrated that life in the confines of the camp was "enabling and nurturing an elaborate and self-conscious historicity among its refugee inhabitants." (1995:52). How we are to explore and make sense of young people's role in and relationship to such historical processes is the challenge that I now seek to take up.

Employing the notion of 'generation'

Generation as cohort and as historical period

Across the sociological literature the notion of 'generation' has been commonly used as if the phenomenon to which it refers is self-evident. Yet, closer examination reveals that authors have utilized the term in diverse and often contradictory ways. According to a review by David Kertzer 'generation' has been employed to signify four distinct phenomena: 'cohort', 'historical period', 'life stage' and 'kinship descent' (1983).

'Generation' in its cohort aspect has been typically used by scholars in order to group together people born during anything from a single year to a decade or more. To

invoke ‘generation’ in this way does not necessarily imply any sense of commonality subjectively experienced or the existence of a shared “frame of interpretation” (Corsten, 2003:48). In Karl Mannheim’s highly influential thesis about the ‘problem of generations’ (1952[1928]) the objectively determined category of ‘cohort’ is referred to as “generation location”. When those within an age cohort share some sense of commonality they become, in Mannheim’s terms, “generation as actuality”. For this to happen he deemed it necessary to “experience the same historical problems” (Ibid: 304). Various authors have taken up Mannheim’s enquiry into the ways that cohorts of children, younger than the ‘youth’ in which he was especially interested, become self-conscious groupings (e.g. Corsten, 2003; Hengst, 2009). It is in this latter, subjective sense of ‘generation as actuality’ that I employ ‘cohort’ in the schema suggested below.

In the refugee and migration literatures generation is often invoked with reference to either the moment of departure or of settlement in a new locale. Thus we find frequent discussion of differences between ‘first’ and ‘second’ (etc) generation migrants / refugees. Such usage can be misleading, however. While it may, in some respects, indicate age differences as, for example, in use of the term ‘Generation 1.5’ to indicate children who arrived in a country at age 12 or less (Rumbaut, 2004: 1162), it also commonly groups together people of very different chronological ages and at diverse stages in the life course. The particular time that a large number of people were forced to flee or when they reached a new country might be deemed to constitute a clear historical period. However, age and life stage, amongst other factors, will inevitably mediate experience of integration or resettlement. Thus, it is important to attend to both the point of exile as an historical moment or period as well as cohort objectively determined by chronological age in order to understand experience

without conflating the two through unreflexive use of terms such as 'first generation refugee'.

Generation as life stage and in kinship descent

The two remaining uses of generation amongst the four that Kertzer enumerated (op. cit.) invoke 'life stage' and 'kinship descent' respectively. The first of these refers to a stage such as 'youth', 'middle age' or 'post-retirement'. Each of these entails different entitlements and obligations as determined by local cultural and political-economic conditions.

As Peter Loizos has pointed out, position in the life course can have an important bearing upon how displacement is experienced (2007). In his study of Greek Cypriots forced to flee to the south of the island by the events of 1974 he observed the differences between: younger people without caring duties "who might be free to consider their options"; elders (60 years plus) "who have discharged their major lifetime responsibilities" and would therefore "not be faced with the tasks of provision for dependents"; and those in middle adulthood (34-44 years old) who carried "multiple responsibilities for others" and who were, therefore, "likely to experience displacement as hugely unsettling" (2007: 207-208). These observations illustrate the effects of being displaced at a particular point in the life cycle as differentiated from the so-called 'cohort effect' when a group of peers, through their interaction, develop a common reaction. Both are important to understanding age position and the impact of events but they are not the same.

The fourth major way in which 'generation' is employed, according to Kertzer, is to denote the distinction between kin (op. cit. 126). This brings to mind images of family trees in which parent-child connections constitute the vertical axis and sibling and

conjugal relationships the horizontal. Much of the migration literature utilises 'generation' in this sense within studies that seek to ascertain differences between parents and children in values, knowledge, class position and - specifically in relation to migrants and refugees – with regard to processes of integration (Hirschman, 1994; Rumbaut, 2004; Zhou, 1997).

The parent-child dynamic has been an important theme in the consideration of generation within childhood studies. Leena Alanen, in particular, has drawn attention to the 'generational order': likening the mutual constitution of the generations of 'children' and 'adults', respectively, to the gendered ordering of relations between 'men' and 'women' (2009). Alanen is interested in the role of children in reproducing such an order, observing that scholars have tended to look at this from the sole perspective of adults / parents and the actions associated with 'parenting'. Citing Berry Mayall (1996), she suggests that we should also pay attention to the actions of 'childing' (2001:135). The observations of Rachel Hinton about the actions of Bhutanese refugee children in the camps of Nepal (2000) provide a helpful illustration of this point. Hinton cites the example of five year old Kamal to suggest the ways that the young "encouraged care-givers to define themselves as supportive parents" (p.209) in a situation of long-term displacement where many adults struggled with depression and "feelings of abandonment" (p.200):

> *Frequently in the private forum of his own home he resorted to breastfeeding and behaviour patterns regarded as immature within his culture for a child of his age… He emphasized and even created dependency and in so doing made salient his parent's value.* (p. 207)

Amongst a displaced population being a 'good child' can also entail demonstration of loyalty to the homeland or to cultural origins (e.g. Miller et. al. 2008:77) Such demonstrations are produced by and serve to reproduce the 'generational order' indicated by Alanen. I take this point up below when discussing how, in Hussein Camp, young people negotiate the expectations of adults with regards to knowledge of and feeling for the Palestinian homeland.

Exploring the age position in Hussein Camp

Young Palestinian refugees as historical actors: milk-kinship

Hussein Camp in Amman was one of four camps established in Jordan to house Palestinians fleeing their homes as a result of the Arab-Israeli War of 1948. The extended family and village / town of origin have both constituted key principles of social organisation in the camp. Over the years, however, the neighbourhood – consisting of around 30 houses on one street of the camp - has also gained significance in terms of everyday relations of mutual support and in the choice of marriage partners. In the development of neighbourhood identity and cohesion, and in the social change that this represents children play an important role from infancy: their bodies are the vehicles through which 'community' is reproduced.

According to Islamic law a child who feeds from a woman's breast would thereby establish a relationship with her of milk kin (*rid'aa*) (Altorki, 1980). Otherwise unrelated infants who breastfeed from the same woman therefore become 'milk siblings'. In the case of male and female milk siblings there would be a consequent relaxation of the distancing otherwise customary from around the time of puberty. There would also be a prohibition upon them marrying one another. In Hussein Camp such relationships of milk kin were both effect and cause of close physical proximity

and social solidarity. Partly through milk-kinship the camp evolved from an emergency facility housing groups of refugees differentiated along lines of family / clan and location of origin into a community made up of self-conscious neighbourhoods. As the vehicle for milk kin relationships the young were thus implicated from birth in the ongoing development of social relations within the space of the camp: their bodies objects and subjects of processes of change that are thoroughly historical.

Generations in Hussein Camp

Within the literature on refugee camps, 'generation' is frequently invoked in relation to the moment of exile. Those who directly experienced displacement are commonly referred to as 'first generation', their children born in the camps become 'second generation', and so on (e.g. Jansen, 2011: 218). However, those who fled Palestine in 1948 were inevitably of very different chronological ages. Additionally, in most families it was common for two or three generations – in kinship descent terms – to flee from their villages together. Thus, while the notion of 'first generation refugee' etc was heard in the camp and noteworthy from a rhetorical point of view, it is not helpful in understanding age position. Suffice to say that the young people with whom I conducted fieldwork had all been born in Hussein Camp. For the most part this was also true for their parents.

More relevant here are the kinship and cohort aspects of generations. The dynamics between children and their parents / grandparents at the individual level should be considered as an aspect of the objectification of the young in popular political discourse. The notion of 'generation' (in Arabic *jeel*) was invoked explicitly in rhetorics of redemption of the community-in-exile. Thus, in Hussein Camp adults

spoke in formal gatherings about young people (implicitly male) as *jeel al-awdeh* ('generation of return') and as *jeel al-aqsa* ('generation of al-Aqsa'). The first of these was part of the nationalist, broadly secular, project of return to former homes and homeland. The latter term employs an explicitly Islamic symbol - al-Aqsa mosque: the third holiest shrine in Islam. This term was in keeping with the discourse – promoted by Islamists - of Palestine as holy Muslim land that needed to be redeemed, rather than as a place that held specific importance for the families and communities displaced from there. Although the two terms were often used interchangeably, the difference between them is illustrative of broader differences within the community of Hussein Camp at that time, with the increasing prominence of the Islamist movement in many of the institutions of the camp, including the youth club (see Hart, 2004).

The public discourse that positioned teenage males as agents of collective redemption illustrates one way in which the generational order was reproduced in Hussein Camp in the late 1990s. Young men (and women) in the youth centres and schools would engage in organised activities such as folklore performances and recitations intended to demonstrate and affirm their connection to Palestine and willingness to play the role identified for them by adults. Within the family and neighourhood the reproduction of the generational order was overlaid by the dynamics of kin relations. On countless occasions in homes and in casual conversations sitting in the narrow streets of the camp parents, relatives or older neighbours would ask children to tell me about Palestine. The young people would always respond with seriousness, reciting information about the town or village from which the family or neighbourhood members came, together with information about the fertile land, the sea, and so on. While these small performances were ostensibly for my benefit, I came to understand that they were also demonstrations of loyalty to adults significant in those young

people's lives. They signalled awareness of adult authority and of the respect due to parents, grandparents and older people in the neighbourhood.

Amongst young males such gestures of respect and public displays of loyalty were often mixed with private expression of unease about the project of 'return' to Palestine. In the case of teenage males in Hussein Camp the prospect of subsistence farming was far from the ambitions shaped by life in Amman and a classroom-based education (see Turner, 2001:163). Some expressed to me explicit antipathy towards the project of 'return' due to specific experience within the family. In several of the households that I visited regularly men in their forties or older who had once been involved as *fedayi* (freedom fighters) with one or other faction and had been injured or imprisoned and tortured, served as exemplars to their sons and nephews of the failure of the nationalist project of return. These men were often unable to function in their expected role within the family and community. Moreover, reports commonly circulated that the monthly pension payable to the former *fedayi* or their families by the PLO was now being received spasmodically, if at all. It was noticeable that amongst the young male relatives of such men interest in and engagement with the collective project of redeeming Palestine held diminished attraction. This is illustrative of an intersection between the events of a particular moment (generation as historical period) and the formation of a cohort specific disposition.

Many males in their early teens spoke to me of their ambitions to join one of the professions in Jordan. However, by age 16 or 17 such talk began to be replaced by discussion of migration in search of a better life. Sat together in the streets of the neighbourhood or during trips out of town conversation would often turn to the viability and relative merits of different destination countries. They swapped information about men who had migrated and returned as visitors bearing symbols of

their apparent success. Such discussions may be seen as one aspect of the production of a cohort specific perception of the refugees' situation and prospects. Also important to note was the life stage of these young men: a point at which the transition to (gendered) social adulthood became an issue of increasing concern.

In the foregoing discussion I have sought, in general terms, to indicate ways in which the different notions of 'generation' found across the literature and distinguished by Kertzer (1983) may be applied to the setting of Hussein Camp. I now move to give this discussion more detail through consideration of a particular individual and the changes that I witnessed in him from early teens to age 18.

Qusay

The research that I conducted in Hussein Camp was focussed on the ways that Palestinian refugees in the second decade of life described a relationship to 'Palestine'. This was a place that none of them had seen first-hand but about which they had heard a great deal from different sources – the family, school, mosque and youth club to name only the most obvious. Most of the 50 or so young people with whom I engaged – as researcher, teacher, neighbor and friend - were full Jordanian citizens as well as refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

One of the most articulate and outspoken of my young interlocutors was a young man whom I shall call 'Qusay'. He took pride in his impressive knowledge about his family's village in Palestine and displayed the greatest awareness of Palestinian folklore of all the young people with whom I engaged. Qusay was 12 when we first met through my involvement as a volunteer English teacher in the local UN school. About six months later a football championship was held for nations throughout the

region. Palestinian and Jordanian teams were amongst those competing. There seemed to be support for both amongst the young people in Hussein Camp. However, in the days leading up to a match between the two I asked several of them which of the two teams they would be supporting and why. Qusay was one of my respondents. I had fully expected him to say that he was behind the Palestinian team given the evident pride with which he had spoken about Palestine on several occasions previously. He had also expressed stout support for the Wihdat football team in the national league: a team that, due to its association with the other main refugee camp in Amman, was considered "Palestinian". However, to my great surprise he told me that he would be supporting the Jordanian team. When I asked him about the reason for this he replied:

> *Look, Palestine is the country of my forefathers and my father but I was born here, I eat and drink from Jordan and I am clothed from here. So it is my country and I must support it.*

In 2003 I returned to Hussein Camp. By this time Qusay was 18 years old. A few months earlier he had completed the *Tawjihi* high school matriculation exam. A good overall score in this exam is vital for students hoping to pursue higher education. Given the intelligence, energy and academic aptitude he had displayed as a 12 and 13 year old, I anticipated that Qusay would have done very well in the *Tawjihi*. When I asked him about this, however, he surprised me again. It transpired that he had achieved a poor result – certainly not high enough to secure a place at a university or college of any standing. In the course of our subsequent meetings we spoke at some length about this result and about his experience over the years since my initial time in Hussein Camp. At one point he said:

> *I cry when I think of my life as a child. We only thought about tomorrow,*

about playing.

When I was in tenth grade[ii] I began to lose hope in the future. I understood that no matter what I do, here in Jordan I am a Palestinian refugee from a poor family. I can't succeed. After that I wasn't interested in school. I lost my ambition.

During my original fieldwork I had witnessed many young men in Hussein Camp begin to lose their enthusiasm for study around the age of thirteen. Through inspection of school registers I had noted the common spike in the drop-out rate around this age and in the successive years. Most of those young men I had known who had dropped out around the age of thirteen were not especially academic and often they or their parents affirmed that a long-term livelihood might be better achieved through some form of apprenticeship. On the other hand, there were young men in the camp who had done well at school, gone on to university and were pursuing employment in various professional fields both in Amman and overseas, as a consequence of talent, single-minded determination, and perhaps some measure of good fortune or, at least, helpful connections.

Given his energy, entrepreneurial skills and keen intelligence I had anticipated that Qusay would be one of those who would continue with and succeed in their studies. However, through our further discussions I learned from him about particular experiences that had discouraged him. It transpired that Qusay's father had lost his job working for a government-owned corporation a couple of years earlier and had struggled since to find regular employment. Qusay's eldest brother had taken on responsibility as main breadwinner working overseas but his earnings were insufficient. Qusay spoke bitterly about his father's redundancy claiming that when the company made cuts they had targeted employees of Palestinian origin. It seemed

that this single experience, more than any other, had sharpened within him a sense of marginality inflected both by class and by origin. Examples of successful and very wealthy Palestinians were abundant in Amman but such people were commonly as distant to Qusay and many of his peers as the 'pure Jordanians' who, in their view, ran the government and army and who, according to general perception in Hussein Camp, discriminated in access to higher education and public employment against the Palestinians.

Qusay's surprising failure in the Tawjihi examination and his sense of despondency prompted me to think further about the ways that young people may be situated historically. The notion of 'generation', with the four dimensions of (1) kinship descent; (2) cohort; (3) life stage; (4) historical period seemed especially salient as a heuristic for comprehending this.

In a later conversation with Qusay he told me about various male friends of his age who had gone to fight against the allied forces in Iraq (this was a few months after the March 2003 invasion by the US, UK and allied forces). He shared his own thoughts about following in their footsteps and becoming a 'martyr'. Although this was a plan that he ultimately did not put into practice, his evident interest in doing so gives some indication of an important shift in thinking between young men of his cohort and that of fathers and grandfathers – as supporters of the secular nationalist movement - at a similar stage in their lives. This entailed a refocusing of collective identification: the concern with 'Palestine' as an ancestral homeland from which all had a familial connection was giving way to a sense of membership in a pan-Islamic community. Rather than fighting for the liberation of specific villages and towns lost to Israel in 1948 and 1967 the goal appeared to be shifting for young men of Qusay's cohort to *jihad* against an alien power that threatened part of the Islamic *ummah* – whether in

Palestine or elsewhere in the region. This change is indicated in the move from the term *jeel al-awdeh* ('generation of return') to *jeel al-aqsa* ('generation of al-aqsa') discussed above.

The new focus was part of the vision offered by the Islamists who had become a powerful presence within Hussein Camp – an historical change significant for young people who attended the youth club and other institutions of the camp. The Islamists offered an ideology distinctly different from that of the PLO – various factions of which had, until the late 1990s, run the youth club in the camp. The vision of the Islamists stressed the importance of faith as an essential element of the struggle for liberation. Furthermore, they suggested that the failure of previous generations – in kinship terms - could be explained by lack of such faith. Thus an important element of change was discernible in their outlook and in the means of pursuing redemption from a position of exile. The attraction expressed by Qusay and others in his cohort to the project of liberating Islamic land that rejected the secular Palestinian nationalism of parents and grandparents can be located at the intersection of generation in the aspects of historical period and kinship, respectively.

While all young men aged 18 in 2003 might, at one level, be considered members of the same cohort (Mannheim's 'generation location'), as already mentioned not all young men of Qusay's chronological age responded like him to the political events unfolding at that moment. Those that did shared also his sense of alienation from Jordanian society for the perceived discrimination against Palestinian refugees. Together these young men might be considered to constitute Mannheim's 'generation as actuality'. This cohort aspect of generation illustrated by Qusay and his friends was commonly reinforced by intense social interaction amongst boys from an early age. The neighbourhood of the camp provided a forum wherein knowledge was imparted

and constructed, attitudes formed, and collaborative action undertaken (see Hart, 2008b). As a group young men participated in activities organised by Islamists. Through the youth club they participated in trips, sports events and cultural evenings. They also joined afterschool classes focused on study of the Quran. Through these various activities young men strengthened the bond between them while engaging with a particular religious-political discourse often very different from that espoused by parents and grandparents within the domestic realm.

To understand Qusay's educational trajectory and his views at age 18 it is also helpful to consider the life stage aspect of generation. Through the teenage years young men typically became increasingly aware and reflective about the longer-term prospects for securing a viable livelihood. This was not a matter of economy alone since marriage entailed considerable expense for the groom in terms of payment of the *mahr* (brideprice), provision of accommodation and clothing for the couple and the wedding celebrations themselves. Marriage was a critical rite of passage toward achievement of respected male adult status – a point underlined by the awkward position of unmarried males from their mid-twenties onwards. No longer boys but not yet heads of their own households with children of their own, such males often kept a low profile within the camp (Hart, 2008b). The prospect of such a fate was clear to Qusay and, like several of his peers, was attributed to the political-economic marginality of Palestinian refugees in Jordan: something that they could see no direct means to overcome.

Qusay's experience of life between the ages of 12 and 18 had occurred within a set of political-economic events that were historically specific, contributing to the distinctiveness of the teenage years of him and his cohort from that of parents. Key features of this period from 1997-2003 that had particular salience for Qusay and his

cohort included the worsening economic situation in Jordan for those at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder. While prices rose, partly as a consequence of the removal of subsidies on basic goods by the government, wages improved little. The job market had grown progressively more crowded during the 1990s as a consequence of the expulsion of Palestinians from several Gulf states following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and subsequent war, and the very limited opportunities for employment in that region thereafter. Moreover, increasingly stringent restrictions on immigration introduced by many European states, Canada, Australia and the United States had made it far harder for young men like Qusay to follow the path of men in previous decades who had sought education or gainful employment abroad. The stories of success, real or imagined, told by relatives and neighbours returning from overseas contrasted sharply with young men's experiences of standing in long queues outside Western embassies in the futile quest for a visa.

The prospects for 'return' to Palestine during this period were dimmer than ever. The Oslo Peace Process instigated in 1994 had, by the late 1990s, come to a virtual halt. In any event, this process offered no obvious prospect of return for Palestinians living outside the occupied territory of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, which had negotiated with Israel on behalf of the Palestinian people was, by the late 1990s, considered by many I spoke with in the camp to have abandoned them.

Two years after the 1995 signing of the Jordan-Israel peace treaty the authorities began to demolish homes in one part of Hussein Camp in order to construct a new highway through the city. Hundreds of families were displaced as a consequence. For many young people, as well as their parents and grandparents, this was interpreted as evidence of the Jordanian authorities' determination to thin out areas where large

numbers of Palestinian refugees lived in close proximity as part of its project of alignment with Israel and western interests.

Throughout this same period the Islamists had grown in strength and numbers both within Hussein Camp and more widely in Jordanian society. I have already suggested key ways in which their vision differed from that of Palestinian nationalism as espoused by the PLO that had failed to deliver on its promises or compensate for sacrifices made.

I have here mentioned a few of the historical events and processes that most obviously impacted the lives of Qusay and his peers. It was these events that were discussed as part of everyday interaction. The impact of such events and their interpretation were always mediated by the cohort and by the relationship between parents and children (generation in kinship terms). Thus, for example, the dwindling support offered to the refugees by the PLO compounded the sense amongst young men that the nationalist movement had failed and that the sacrifices of older generations had been for nothing. For their part, parents and grandparents could offer little to counter this view. The appeal of the Islamists' vision for Qusay and others in his cohort is comprehensible from this perspective that invokes generation in the four distinct ways suggested by Kertzer.

Conclusion

In recent years efforts to standardize various aspects of humanitarian intervention have proliferated. Categories based upon chronological age such as 'child' (0-18), 'adolescent' (10-19), and 'youth' (15-24) are being invoked to distinguish groups within the target population to whom specific programming is commonly directed across diverse contexts. Projects focused on participation and on reproductive health

with ‘adolescents’ or on livelihoods with ‘youth’ are examples. While such standardization ensures a degree of visibility and inclusion for sections of the population once largely ignored within humanitarian intervention it also risks reducing the complexities of age position to a simple number.

This paper has explored the need and means to attend to age position in a more complex and multiple manner. This is important not only in order to comprehend the particular needs and challenges of individuals but also to make sense of the differential impact of larger historical processes. I have discussed four dimensions of age position utilizing the principal sociological uses of the term ‘generation’ identified by Kertzer: as ‘cohort’, ‘historical period’, ‘kinship descent’ and ‘life stage’. Discussion of one young man, Qusay, was offered to illustrate the dynamics of age position in the ambiguous and marginal setting of a camp for long-term refugees.

Over the period that I engaged with him, important change took place in Qusay’s age position - from that of a 12 year old boy focused on schoolwork, sport and music in a fairly narrow spatial domain to an 18 year old young man looking towards the prospects of attaining social adulthood possessed of a wider sense of his social, economic and political environment and aware of societal expectations. By this point in his life feelings of alienation and marginality had replaced those of loyalty to the country of residence. Were I to engage with Qusay twenty years later – at the age of thirty-eight - no doubt his views would take a different shape. Understanding the aetiology of these views might entail consideration of the impact of wider historical changes; the experiences of his cohort of friends and acquaintances; the obligations towards his elderly kin; and the expectations and entitlements associated with his likely role as a father or, failing that, his predicament as an adult (in terms of chronological age at least) who had not thus far perpetuated the family line.

If the time comes for governments and humanitarian agencies to engage seriously with the pursuit of a long-term solution to the situation of Palestinian refugees they will need to pay attention to the history of exile. This history can be told at many levels: from the national narrative to the specific and dynamic histories of individuals. Each of those individual histories will affect the response to any proposed solution and all will be mediated by factors of class, gender and, in its various dimensions, age as well.

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[i] This is by no means to deny or downplay the enormous obstacles or the violations of basic human rights that many refugee camp dwellers globally experience.

[ii] 15-16 years old